

April 27, 2000

**Could the Answer Be . . . NO?**

**Has Clinton Gotten Assurances that Elian  
Would be with His father and Not with  
Fidel? Clinton's Mouthpiece Won't Say.**

The Clinton Administration's endlessly repeated claim that their policy toward Elian Gonzalez (and their justification for the pre-dawn raid on the home of the boy's Miami relatives) is that they just want him to be returned to his father. This claim raises one simple and obvious question: has the Administration received *or even sought* any assurance from the Cuban authorities that if the United States sends him back that Elian will be allowed to live in peace with his father — and not be subjected to state-sponsored reprogramming for use as a "revolutionary icon"? (Those Cuban experts warning of the latter fate have included Alina Fernandez, Fidel Castro's daughter who defected in 1993 and warns that a "golden jail," complete with an army of psychiatrists and psychologists, has already been prepared for the six-year old ["Fox Hannity & Colmes," *Fox News Network*, 4/18/00].)

Two days ago at the regular White House press briefing, one reporter asked Clinton mouthpiece Joe Lockhart this very question. With all the evasion and deviousness that would do his boss proud, he repeatedly refused to answer. A partial transcript follows below.

**HEADLINE: THE WHITE HOUSE REGULAR BRIEFING**

**BRIEFER: JOE LOCKHART, WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN**

**TIME: 1:02 P.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2000**

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**Questioner:** Joe, I don't know if you've been asked this. Forgive me if you have. But Graham has also — the press conference he just held asked the question whether there have been any kinds of negotiations between the U.S. and Cuban governments to reassure the administration that if Elian is returned to Cuba that he will, in fact, be with his father and will

not be removed to some kind of a reeducation school or used in some kind of a propaganda way. In other words, what guarantees do you have that he actually will return to a, quote, "normal family life"?

**MR. LOCKHART:** I would — I am not aware of discussions. I'd go to the State Department to see if there's been any discussions like that.

**Q:** Well, wait a minute, do you feel —

**MR. LOCKHART:** Yeah.

**Q:** Do you have any reason — do you feel that if Elian does go back to Cuba and is, in fact, not returned to his previous life and is put into this school that they're talking about setting up and is, you know, used as a revolutionary icon that the administration would be responsible—

**MR. LOCKHART:** Well, you're asking me a question that goes many steps down the road. We have made very clear that our view is — and it's been made very clear to anyone both in this country and outside this country— that the boy's place is with his father.

**Q:** Right. But do you know that he will, in fact, be with his father? Do you — does that —

**MR. LOCKHART:** We have no reason to believe, based on our — the process that the INS has gone through at this point that the boy will not be with his father.

**Q:** So it sounds like the INS has some kind of assurance. That's what I'm asking you about.

**MR. LOCKHART:** Well, I would go to the INS to go to their discussions. I'm not —

**Q:** It's not your understanding that they —

**MR. LOCKHART:** No, I — listen, I would go to the INS and ask them that question if you're interested in the answer.

[intervening questions/answers] . . .

**Q:** Have Cuban officials had access to the Gonzalez family at Andrews?

**MR. LOCKHART:** I don't know. You should ask to the Justice Department, which is handling it.

[intervening Q/A] . . .

Q: Joe.

MR. LOCKHART: Yeah.

Q: If it's the White House view — what view that — if the White House supports this raid because it will reunite Elian with his father, why haven't you gotten assurance that he will stay that way if he gets back to Cuba?

MR. LOCKHART: You are raising a question here that is, as far as I know, not an issue.

Q: Well, how do you know?

MR. LOCKHART: Well, I mean, how do you know that it is?

Q: I don't know. I'm asking you. You're going to be deporting him.

MR. LOCKHART: Okay, I understand that — well —

Q: Joe, let me try to put a finer point on it. At his press conference, Senator Graham, who you said has raised some legitimate concerns, said he had a concern —

MR. LOCKHART: No, I think he's raised — I think he's legitimately said he disagrees with us.

Q: Well, he said that his anxiety is, and he believes that some of the Miami relatives share this, is that if Elian is returned to Cuba he will become, in his words, quote, "a trophy child for Communism."

Now, I guess what we're all trying to drive at here is did the administration receive any assurances, or has it sought any, that Elian will not become a tool for any other larger political issue back there once — if in fact he is returned?

MR. LOCKHART: Well, again, I don't — I don't —

Q: Is this an issue the administration cares about?

MR. LOCKHART: I think the administration cares deeply that — and I think we have demonstrated at every point in this case that we, that politics should not be part of this; a broader debate should not use a six-year-old boy as a pawn. And we've made very clear that a father, in this case, should be with his son.

**Q:** But he has different rights under the Cuban constitution than he has in America. And what we're asking you is, if you care deeply about this, what actions have you taken to satisfy yourselves that —

**MR. LOCKHART:** And — and — Mara? Mara? And what I think I've told you a number of times now — and repeating the questions I don't know helps — is that I don't know. And, you know, you can check at the State Department, we can check here, but I think we have demonstrated our commitment.

**Q:** Well wait a second.

**MR. LOCKHART:** Yeah.

**Q:** The reason this is confusing to me is you keep on referring the questions you don't want to answer to [inaudible]. You're representing the president here. When you say the administration cares deeply about this, you mean the president cares deeply. Certainly he must know the answer to this question; if he cares deeply about it, he's inquired. I mean, he wouldn't just say, "I really care what happens to Elian when he gets back, but I don't have any idea what that will be and the Justice Department will take care of it."

**MR. LOCKHART:** I don't know — understand where you're going with this, so let's move on.

RPC Staff Contact: Jim Jatras, 224-2946